

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



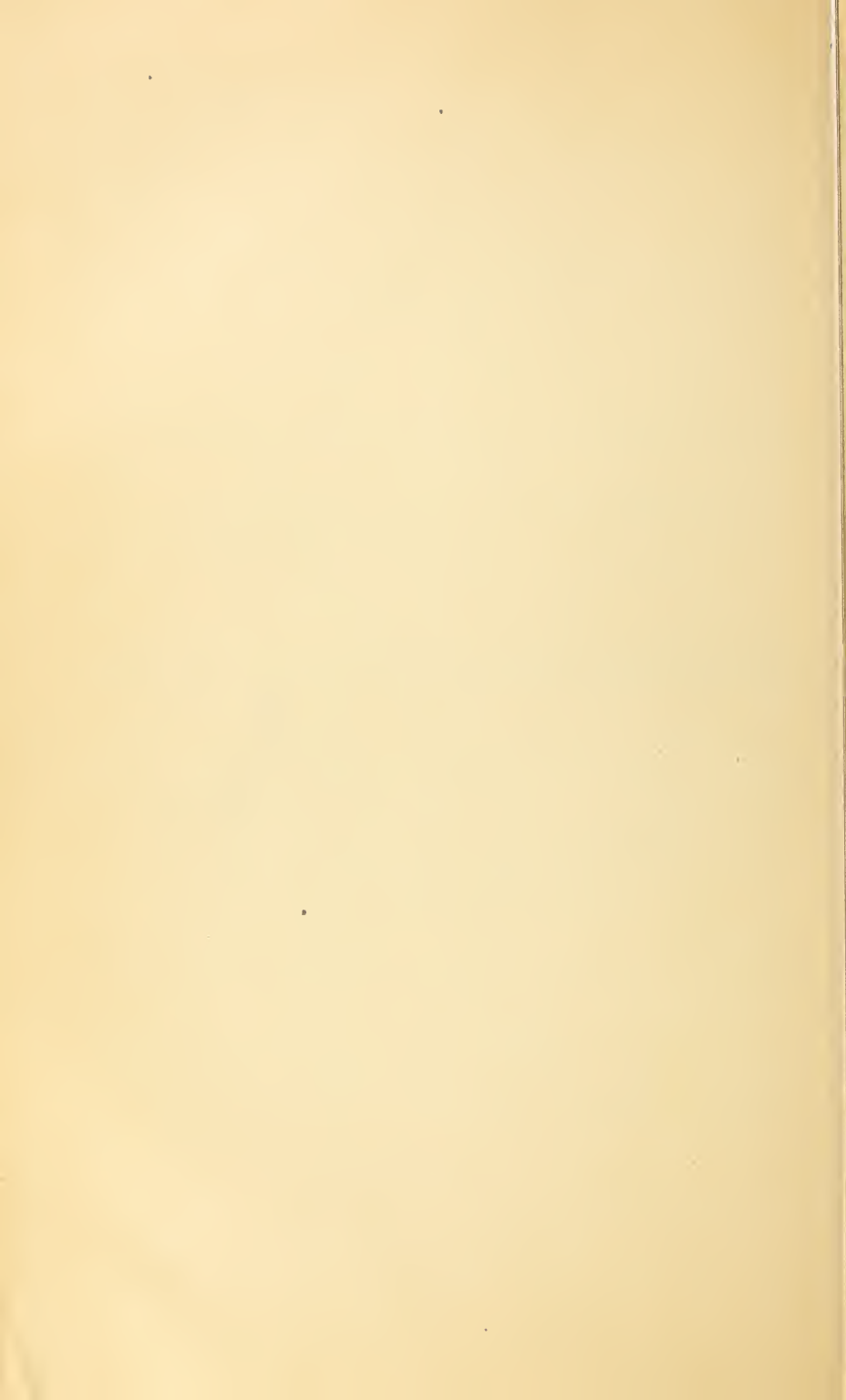
Issued July 1, 1907.

United States Department of Agriculture,

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY—Circular No. 24.

THE MAN WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS.

Address of President Roosevelt at the Semi-Centennial
Celebration of the Founding of Agricultural
Colleges in the United States, at
Lansing, Mich., May 31, 1907.



THE MAN WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS.

The fiftieth anniversary of the founding of this college is an event of national significance, for Michigan was the first State in the Union to found this, the first agricultural college in America. The Nation is to be congratulated on the fact that the Congress at Washington has repeatedly enacted laws designed to aid the several States in establishing and maintaining agricultural and mechanical colleges. I greet all such colleges, through their representatives who have gathered here to-day, and bid them Godspeed in their work. I no less heartily invoke success for the mechanical and agricultural schools; and I wish to say that I have heard particularly good reports of the Minnesota Agricultural High School for the way in which it sends its graduates back to the farms to work as practical farmers.

OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND WHAT IT LACKS.

As a people there is nothing in which we take a juster pride than our educational system. It is our boast that every boy or girl has the chance to get a school training; and we feel it is a prime national duty to furnish this training free, because only thereby can we secure the proper type of citizenship in the average American. Our public schools and our colleges have done their work well, and there is no class of our citizens deserving of heartier praise than the men and women who teach in them.

Nevertheless, for at least a generation we have been waking to the knowledge that there must be additional education beyond that provided in the public school as it is managed to-day. Our school system has hitherto been well-nigh wholly lacking on the side of industrial training, of the training which fits a man for the shop and the farm. This is a most serious lack, for no one can look at the peoples of mankind as they stand at present without realizing that industrial training is one of the most potent factors in national development. We of the United States must develop a system under which each individual citizen shall be trained so as to be effective individually as an economic unit, and fit to be organized with his fellows so that he and they can work in efficient fashion together. This question is vital to our future progress, and public attention should be focused upon it. Surely it is eminently in accord with the principles of our democratic life that we should furnish the highest average industrial training for the ordinary skilled workman. But it is a curious thing that in industrial training we have tended to devote our energies to producing high-grade men at the top rather than in the ranks. Our engineering schools, for instance, com-

pare favorably with the best in Europe, whereas we have done almost nothing to equip the private soldiers of the industrial army—the mechanic, the metal-worker, the carpenter. Indeed, too often our schools train away from the shop and the forge; and this fact, together with the abandonment of the old apprentice system, has resulted in such an absence of facilities for providing trained journeymen that in many of our trades almost all the recruits among the workmen are foreigners. Surely this means that there must be some systematic method provided for training young men in the trades, and that this must be coordinated with the public school system. No industrial school can turn out a finished journeyman; but it can furnish the material out of which a finished journeyman can be made, just as an engineering school furnishes the training which enables its graduates speedily to become engineers.

We hear a great deal of the need of protecting our workingmen from competition with pauper labor. I have very little fear of the competition of pauper labor. The nations with pauper labor are not the formidable industrial competitors of this country. What the American workingman has to fear is the competition of the highly skilled workingman of the countries of greatest industrial efficiency. By the tariff and by our immigration laws we can always protect ourselves against the competition of pauper labor here at home; but when we contend for the markets of the world we can get no protection, and we shall then find that our most formidable competitors are the nations in which there is the most highly developed business ability, the most highly developed industrial skill; and these are the qualities which we must ourselves develop.

DIGNITY AND IMPORTANCE OF LABOR.

We have been fond as a Nation of speaking of the dignity of labor, meaning thereby manual labor. Personally I don't think that we begin to understand what a high place manual labor should take; and it never can take this high place unless it offers scope for the best type of man. We have tended to regard education as a matter of the head only, and the result is that a great many of our people, themselves the sons of men who worked with their hands, seem to think that they rise in the world if they get into a position where they do no hard manual work whatever; where their hands will grow soft, and their working clothes will be kept clean. Such a conception is both false and mischievous. There are, of course, kinds of labor where the work must be purely mental, and there are other kinds of labor where, under existing conditions, very little demand indeed is made upon the mind, though I am glad to say that I think the proportion of men engaged in this kind of work is diminishing. But in any healthy community, in any community with the great solid qualities which alone make a really great

nation, the bulk of the people should do work which makes demands upon both the body and the mind. Progress can not permanently consist in the abandonment of physical labor, but in the development of physical labor so that it shall represent more and more the work of the trained mind in the trained body. To provide such training, to encourage in every way the production of the men whom it alone can produce, is to show that as a nation we have a true conception of the dignity and importance of labor. The calling of the skilled tiller of the soil, the calling of the skilled mechanic, should alike be recognized as professions, just as emphatically as the callings of lawyer, of doctor, of banker, merchant, or clerk. The printer, the electrical worker, the house painter, the foundry man, should be trained just as carefully as the stenographer or the drug clerk. They should be trained alike in head and in hand. They should get over the idea that to earn twelve dollars a week and call it "salary" is better than to earn twenty-five dollars a week and call it "wages." The young man who has the courage and the ability to refuse to enter the crowded field of the so-called professions and to take to constructive industry is almost sure of an ample reward in earnings, in health, in opportunity to marry early, and to establish a home with reasonable freedom from worry. We need the training, the manual dexterity, and industrial intelligence which can be best given in a good agricultural, or building, or textile, or watch-making, or engraving, or mechanical school. It should be one of our prime objects to put the mechanic, the wage-worker who works with his hands, and who ought to work in a constantly larger degree with his head, on a higher plane of efficiency and reward, so as to increase his effectiveness in the economic world, and therefore the dignity, the remuneration, and the power of his position in the social world. To train boys and girls in merely literary accomplishments to the total exclusion of industrial, manual, and technical training tends to unfit them for industrial work: and in real life most work is industrial.

The problem of furnishing well-trained craftsmen, or rather journeymen fitted in the end to become such, is not simple—few problems are simple in the actual process of their solution—and much care and forethought and practical common sense will be needed, in order to work it out in a fairly satisfactory manner. It should appeal to all our citizens. I am glad that societies have already been formed to promote industrial education, and that their membership includes manufacturers and leaders of labor unions, educators and publicists, men of all conditions who are interested in education and in industry. It is such cooperation that offers most hope for a satisfactory solution of the question as to what is the best form of industrial school, as to the means by which it may be articulated with the public school system, and as to the way to secure for the boys trained therein the opportunity to acquire in the

industries the practical skill which alone can make them finished journeymen.

THE FARMER IN RELATION TO THE WELFARE OF THE WHOLE COUNTRY.

There is but one person whose welfare is as vital to the welfare of the whole country as is that of the wage-worker who does manual labor; and that is the tiller of the soil—the farmer. If there is one lesson taught by history it is that the permanent greatness of any State must ultimately depend more upon the character of its country population than upon anything else. No growth of cities, no growth of wealth, can make up for a loss in either the number or the character of the farming population. In the United States more than in almost any other country we should realize this and should prize our country population. When this Nation began its independent existence it was as a Nation of farmers. The towns were small and were for the most part mere sea-coast trading and fishing ports. The chief industry of the country was agriculture, and the ordinary citizen was in some way connected with it. In every great crisis of the past a peculiar dependence has had to be placed upon the farming population; and this dependence has hitherto been justified. But it can not be justified in the future if agriculture is permitted to sink in the scale as compared with other employments. We can not afford to lose that preeminently typical American, the farmer who owns his own farm.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING RURAL POPULATIONS.

Yet it would be idle to deny that in the last half century there has been in the eastern half of our country a falling off in the relative condition of the tillers of the soil, although signs are multiplying that the Nation has waked up to the danger and is preparing to grapple effectively with it. East of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio and the Potomac there has been on the whole an actual shrinkage in the number of the farming population since the civil war. In the States of this section there has been a growth of population—in some an enormous growth—but the growth has taken place in the cities, and especially in the larger cities. This has been due to certain economic factors, such as the extension of railroads, the development of machinery, and the openings for industrial success afforded by the unprecedented growth of cities. The increased facility of communication has resulted in the withdrawal from rural communities of most of the small, widely distributed manufacturing and commercial operations of former times, and the substitution therefor of the centralized commercial and manufacturing industries of the cities.

The chief offset to the various tendencies which have told against the farm has hitherto come in the rise of the physical sciences and their application to agricultural practices or to the rendering of country con-

ditions more easy and pleasant. But these countervailing forces are as yet in their infancy. As compared with a few decades ago, the social or community life of country people in the East compares less well than it formerly did with that of the dwellers in cities. Many country communities have lost their social coherence, their sense of community interest. In such communities the country church, for instance, has gone backward both as a social and a religious factor. Now, we can not too strongly insist upon the fact that it is quite as unfortunate to have any social as any economic falling off. It would be a calamity to have our farms occupied by a lower type of people than the hard-working, self-respecting, independent, and essentially manly men and womanly women who have hitherto constituted the most typically American, and on the whole the most valuable, element in our entire Nation. Ambitious native-born young men and women who now tend away from the farm must be brought back to it, and therefore they must have social as well as economic opportunities. Everything should be done to encourage the growth in the open farming country of such institutional and social movements as will meet the demand of the best type of farmers. There should be libraries, assembly halls, social organizations of all kinds. The school building and the teacher in the school building should, throughout the country districts, be of the very highest type, able to fit the boys and girls not merely to live in, but thoroughly to enjoy and to make the most of the country. The country church must be revived. All kinds of agencies, from rural free delivery to the bicycle and the telephone, should be utilized to the utmost; good roads should be favored; everything should be done to make it easier for the farmer to lead the most active and effective intellectual, political, and economic life.

There are regions of large extent where all this, or most of this, has already been realized; and while this is perhaps especially true of great tracts of farming country west of the Mississippi, with some of which I have a fairly intimate personal knowledge, it is no less true of other great tracts of country east of the Mississippi. In these regions the church and the school flourish as never before; there is a more successful and more varied farming industry; the social advantages and opportunities are greater than ever before; life is fuller, happier, more useful; and though the work is more effective than ever, and in a way quite as hard, it is carried on so as to give more scope for well-used leisure. My plea is that we shall all try to make more nearly universal the conditions that now obtain in the most favored localities.

PROGRESS IN AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE.

Nothing in the way of scientific work can ever take the place of business management on a farm. We ought all of us to teach ourselves as much as possible; but we can also all of us learn from others; and

the farmer can best learn how to manage his farm even better than he now does by practice, under intelligent supervision, on his own soil in such a way as to increase his income. This is the kind of teaching which has been carried on in Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas by Doctor Knapp, of the National Department of Agriculture. But much has been accomplished by the growth of what is broadly designated as agricultural science. This has been developed with remarkable rapidity during the last quarter of a century, and the benefit to agriculture has been great. As was inevitable, there was much error and much repetition of work in the early application of money to the needs of agricultural colleges and experiment stations alike by the Nation and the several States. Much has been accomplished; but much more can be accomplished in the future. The prime need must always be for real research, resulting in scientific conclusions of proved soundness. Both the farmer and the legislature must beware of invariably demanding immediate returns from investments in research efforts. It is probably one of our faults as a Nation that we are too impatient to wait a sufficient length of time to accomplish the best results; and in agriculture effective research often, although not always, involves slow and long-continued effort if the results are to be trustworthy. While applied science in agriculture as elsewhere must be judged largely from the standpoint of its actual return in dollars, yet the farmers no more than anyone else can afford to ignore the large results that can be enjoyed because of broader knowledge. The farmer must prepare for using the knowledge that can be obtained through agricultural colleges by insisting upon a constantly more practical curriculum in the schools in which his children are taught. He must not lose his independence, his initiative, his rugged self-sufficiency; and yet he must learn to work in the heartiest cooperation with his fellows.

EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

The corner stones of our unexampled prosperity are, on the one hand, the production of raw material, and its manufacture and distribution on the other. These two great groups of subjects are represented in the National Government principally by the Departments of Agriculture and of Commerce and Labor. The production of raw material from the surface of the earth is the sphere in which the Department of Agriculture has hitherto achieved such notable results. Of all the Executive Departments there is no other, not even the Post-Office, which comes into more direct and beneficent contact with the daily life of the people than the Department of Agriculture, and none whose yield of practical benefits is greater in proportion to the public money expended.

But great as its services have been in the past, the Department of Agriculture has a still larger field of usefulness ahead. It has been

dealing with growing crops. It must hereafter deal also with living men. Hitherto agricultural research, instruction, and agitation have been directed almost exclusively toward the production of wealth from the soil. It is time to adopt in addition a new point of view. Hereafter another great task before the National Department of Agriculture and the similar agencies of the various States must be to foster agriculture for its social results, or, in other words, to assist in bringing about the best kind of life on the farm for the sake of producing the best kind of men. The Government must recognize the far-reaching importance of the study and treatment of the problems of farm life alike from the social and the economic standpoints; and the Federal and State Departments of Agriculture should cooperate at every point.

The farm grows the raw material for the food and clothing of all our citizens; it supports directly almost half of them; and nearly half the children of the United States are born and brought up on farms. How can the life of the farm family be made less solitary, fuller of opportunity, freer from drudgery, more comfortable, happier, and more attractive? Such a result is most earnestly to be desired. How can life on the farm be kept on the highest level, and where it is not already on that level, be so improved, dignified, and brightened as to awaken and keep alive the pride and loyalty of the farmer's boys and girls, of the farmer's wife, and of the farmer himself? How can a compelling desire to live on the farm be aroused in the children that are born on the farm? All these questions are of vital importance not only to the farmer, but to the whole Nation; and the Department of Agriculture must do its share in answering them.

The drift toward the city is largely determined by the superior social opportunities to be enjoyed there, by the greater vividness and movement of city life. Considered from the point of view of national efficiency, the problem of the farm is as much a problem of attractiveness as it is a problem of prosperity. It has ceased to be merely a problem of growing wheat and corn and cattle. The problem of production has not ceased to be fundamental, but it is no longer final; just as learning to read and write and cipher are fundamental, but are no longer the final ends of education. We hope ultimately to double the average yield of wheat and corn per acre; it will be a great achievement; but it is even more important to double the desirability, comfort, and standing of the farmer's life.

We must consider, then, not merely how to produce, but also how production affects the producer. In the past we have given but scant attention to the social side of farm life. We should study much more closely than has yet been done the social organization of the country, and inquire whether its institutions are now really as useful to the farmer as they should be, or whether they should not be given a new direction and a new impulse, for no farmer's life should lie merely

within the boundary of his farm. This study must be of the East and the West, the North and the South; for the needs vary from place to place.

First in importance, of course, comes the effort to secure the mastery of production. Great strides toward this end have already been taken over the larger part of the United States: much remains to be done, but much has been done; and the debt of the Nation to the various agencies of agricultural improvement for so great an advance is not to be overstated. But we can not halt here. The benefits of high social organization include such advantages as ease of communication, better educational facilities, increased comfort of living, and those opportunities for social and intellectual life and intercourse, of special value to the young people and to the women, which are as yet chiefly to be had in centers of population. All this must be brought within the reach of the farmers who live on the farms, of the men whose labor feeds and clothes the towns and cities.

BENEFITS RESULTING FROM COOPERATION.

Farmers must learn the vital need of cooperation with one another. Next to this comes cooperation with the Government, and the Government can best give its aid through associations of farmers rather than through the individual farmer; for there is no greater agricultural problem than that of delivering to the farmer the large body of agricultural knowledge which has been accumulated by the National and State Governments and by the agricultural colleges and schools. Nowhere has the Government worked to better advantage than in the South, where the work done by the Department of Agriculture in connection with the cotton growers of the Southwestern States has been phenomenal in its value. The farmers in the region affected by the boll weevil, in the course of the efforts to fight it, have succeeded in developing a most scientific husbandry, so that in many places the boll weevil became a blessing in disguise. Not only did the industry of farming become of very much greater economic value in its direct results, but it became immensely more interesting to thousands of families. The meetings at which the new subjects of interest were discussed grew to have a distinct social value, while with the farmers were joined the merchants and bankers of the neighborhood. It is needless to say that every such successful effort to organize the farmer gives a great stimulus to the admirable educational work which is being done in the Southern States, as elsewhere, to prepare young people for an agricultural life. It is greatly to be wished that the communities whence these students are drawn and to which they either return or should return could be cooperatively organized; that is, that associations of farmers could be organized, primarily for business purposes, but also with social ends in view. This would mean that the returned students from the institu-

tions of technical learning would find their environment prepared to profit to the utmost by the improvements in technical methods which they had learned.

The people of our farming regions must be able to combine among themselves, as the most efficient means of protecting their industry from the highly organized interests which now surround them on every side. A vast field is open for work by cooperative associations of farmers in dealing with the relation of the farm to transportation and to the distribution and manufacture of raw materials. It is only through such combination that American farmers can develop to the full their economic and social power. Combination of this kind has, in Denmark, for instance, resulted in bringing the people back to the land, and has enabled the Danish peasant to compete in extraordinary fashion, not only at home but in foreign countries, with all rivals.

KIND OF EDUCATION NEEDED.

Agricultural colleges and farmers' institutes have done much in instruction and inspiration; they have stood for the nobility of labor and the necessity of keeping the muscles and the brain in training for industry. They have developed technical departments of high practical value. They seek to provide for the people on the farms an equipment so broad and thorough as to fit them for the highest requirements of our citizenship; so that they can establish and maintain country homes of the best type, and create and sustain a country civilization more than equal to that of the city. The men they train must be able to meet the strongest business competition, at home or abroad, and they can do this only if they are trained not alone in the various lines of husbandry but in successful economic management. These colleges, like the State experiment stations, should carefully study and make known the needs of each section, and should try to provide remedies for what is wrong.

The education to be obtained in these colleges should create as intimate relationship as is possible between the theory of learning and the facts of actual life. Educational establishments should produce highly trained scholars, of course; but in a country like ours, where the educational establishments are so numerous, it is folly to think that their main purpose is to produce these highly trained scholars. Without in the least disparaging scholarship and learning—on the contrary, while giving hearty and ungrudging admiration and support to the comparatively few whose primary work should be creative scholarship—it must be remembered that the ordinary graduate of our colleges should be and must be, primarily, a man and not a scholar. Education should not confine itself to books. It must train executive power, and try to create that right public opinion which is the most potent factor in the proper solution of all political and social questions. Book-learning is very important, but it is by no means everything; and we

shall never get the right idea of education until we definitely understand that a man may be well trained in book-learning and yet, in the proper sense of the word, and for all practical purposes, be utterly uneducated; while a man of comparatively little book-learning may, nevertheless, in essentials have a good education.

IMPROVEMENT OF CONDITIONS AFFECTING COUNTRY LIFE.

It is true that agriculture in the United States has reached a very high level of prosperity; but we can not afford to disregard the signs which teach us that there are influences operating against the establishment or retention of our country life upon a really sound basis. The overextensive and wasteful cultivation of pioneer days must stop and give place to a more economical system. Not only the physical but the ethical needs of the people of the country districts must be considered. In our country life there must be social and intellectual advantages as well as a fair standard of physical comfort. There must be in the country, as in the town, a multiplication of movements for intellectual advancement and social betterment. We must try to raise the average of farm life, and we must also try to develop it so that it shall offer exceptional chances for the exceptional man.

Of course the essential things after all are those which concern all of us as men and women, no matter whether we live in the town or the country, and no matter what our occupations may be. The root problems are much the same for all of us, widely though they may differ in outward manifestation. The most important conditions that tell for happiness within the home are the same for the town and the country; and the relations between employer and employee are not always satisfactory on the farm any more than in the factory. All over the country there is a constant complaint of paucity of farm labor. Without attempting to go into all the features of this question I would like to point out that you can never get the right kind, the best kind, of labor if you offer employment only for a few months, for no man worth anything will permanently accept a system which leaves him in idleness for half the year.

A WORD REGARDING THE FARMER'S FAMILY.

And most important of all, I want to say a special word on behalf of the one who is too often the very hardest worked laborer on the farm—the farmer's wife. Reform, like charity, while it should not end at home, should certainly begin there; and the man, whether he lives on a farm or in a town, who is anxious to see better social and economic conditions prevail through the country at large, should be exceedingly careful that they prevail first as regards his own womankind. I emphatically believe that for the great majority of women the really indispensable industry in which they should engage

is the industry of the home. There are exceptions, of course; but exactly as the first duty of the normal man is the duty of being the home maker, so the first duty of the normal woman is to be the home keeper; and exactly as no other learning is as important for the average man as the learning which will teach him how to make his livelihood, so no other learning is as important for the average woman as the learning which will make her a good housewife and mother. But this does not mean that she should be an overworked drudge. I have hearty sympathy with the movement to better the condition of the average tiller of the soil, of the average wageworker, and I have an even heartier sympathy and applause for the movement which is to better the condition of their respective wives. There is plenty that is hard and rough and disagreeable in the necessary work of actual life; and under the best circumstances, and no matter how tender and considerate the husband, the wife will have at least her full share of work and worry and anxiety; but if the man is worth his salt he will try to take as much as possible of the burden off the shoulders of his helpmate. There is nothing Utopian in the movement; all that is necessary is to strive toward raising the average, both of men and women, to the level on which the highest type of family now stands, among American farmers, among American skilled mechanics, among American citizens generally; for in all the world there is no better and healthier home life, no finer factory of individual character, nothing more representative of what is best and most characteristic in American life than that which exists in the higher type of American family; and this higher type of family is to be found everywhere among us, and is the property of no special group of citizens.

The best crop is the crop of children; the best products of the farm are the men and women raised thereon; and the most instructive and practical treatises on farming, necessary though they be, are no more necessary than the books which teach us our duty to our neighbor, and above all to the neighbor who is of our own household. You young men and women of the agricultural and industrial colleges and schools—and, for that matter, you who go to any college or school—must have some time for light reading; and there is some light reading quite as useful as heavy reading, provided, of course, that you do not read in a spirit of mere vacuity. Aside from the great classics, and thinking only of the many healthy and stimulating books of the day, it is easy to pick out many which can really serve as tracts, because they possess what many avowed tracts and treatises do not, the prime quality of being interesting. You will learn the root principles of self help and helpfulness toward others from "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," just as much as from any formal treatise on charity; you will learn as much sound social and industrial doctrine from Octave Thanet's stories of farmers and wageworkers as from avowed sociological and economic

studies; and I cordially recommend the first chapter of "Aunt Jane of Kentucky" for use as a tract in all families where the men folks tend to selfish or thoughtless or overbearing disregard of the rights of their womenkind.

Do not misunderstand me. I have not the slightest sympathy with those hysterical and foolish creatures who wish women to attain to easy lives by shirking their duties. I have as hearty a contempt for the woman who shirks her duty of bearing and rearing the children, of doing her full housewife's work, as I have for the man who is an idler, who shirks his duty of earning a living for himself and for his household, or who is selfish or brutal toward his wife and children. I believe in the happiness that comes from the performance of duty, not from the avoidance of duty. But I believe also in trying, each of us, as strength is given us, to bear one another's burdens; and this especially in our own homes. No outside training, no cooperation, no Government aid or direction can take the place of a strong and upright character; of goodness of heart combined with clearness of head, and that strength and toughness of fiber necessary to wring success from a rough work-a-day world. Nothing outside of home can take the place of home. The school is an invaluable adjunct to the home, but it is a wretched substitute for it. The family relation is the most fundamental, the most important of all relations. No leader in church or state, in science or art or industry, however great his achievement, does work which compares in importance with that of the father and the mother, "who are the first of sovereigns and the most divine of priests."

